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SUBJECT: CYPRUS TO SUPPORT U.S. ICAO CANDIDACY; SEEKS U.S. HELP WITH AIR TRAFFIC ISSUE

Ref: STATE 115443

(U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (U) Dr. Leonidas Leonidou, Director of the Cyprus Department of Civil Aviation and the Cyprus representative to ICAO, told us that Cyprus would "fully support" the re-election of U.S. in ICAO. On specific issues and policies that arise within ICAO, however, Leonidou deferred to the EU, saying Cyprus would support decisions made within the EU grouping.

¶2. (SBU) In response to our question, Leonidou advised that his Department would become an independent regulator (separated from its current standing as a department within the Ministry of Communications and Works) within the next six months. Leonidou noted the potential for conflict of interest when the same Ministry is both a regulator of flight safety and majority shareholder of the national airline.

¶3. (SBU) Problems between the Republic of Cyprus and the "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus" ("TRNC") are typically part of any interaction here. In this case, Leonidou explained that RoC air traffic control, under still-prevailing international rules, controls all airspace over the island. However, the "TRNC" controls aircraft that fly into Ercan, its lone commercial airport (served only by aircraft from "TRNC" and Turkey) which is considered illegal by the GoC. Leonidou explained that, given the "illegal" nature of Ercan, the GoC air traffic controllers will not speak with the "TRNC" controllers. When GoC controllers try and go through Turkish controllers regarding air traffic over the island, the Turkish authorities refer the GoC back to the "TRNC" controllers to demonstrate the "TRNC's" independent status.

¶4. (SBU) Currently, the GoC controllers monitor transmissions between "TRNC" controllers and aircraft approaching Ercan, however Leonidou is concerned that in case quick action is needed or if there is a misunderstanding of information being "overheard" there is risk of a mid-air collision. Leonidou would like the USG to use its good offices within international civil aviation to help find a solution to work around this political impasse.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Leonidou appeared genuinely concerned over long-standing issues of lack of unified control and poor communication regarding flights into Cyprus. As always, however, we risk getting caught up in the difficult political issues surrounding all things GoC—"TRNC" related if we were to try and directly deal with this problem. A European approach (with USG support) under the catch-all of European integration would seem a better way forward, especially given that numerous European-flagged aircraft (and almost

no U.S. aircraft) fly into Cyprus. Furthermore, Ercan is not the only airport over which the GoC picks a bone. The government disputes air traffic control with the two UK Sovereign Bases on the island as well. At times, the GoC has jeopardized air safety in trying to assert its position with the Sovereign Base Areas.

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